

An Act of Faith: From the Spiritual to the Ritual

Chandrabhanu Pattanayak

A characteristic trait of the social and, to a certain extent, political life of India over the last ten to twenty five years has been the appearance and rapid growth of the influence of various types of new forms of religious worship, as well as of individual saints, incarnate gods, gurus and swamis (religious teachers), yogis and tantrics, astrologers and soothsayers who have a vast and growing number of followers. These cults are called neo-religious because, although their leaders usually use some of the postulates, symbols, and practices of traditional Hinduism, they develop their own rituals, system of views, and cult practices that differ widely and are often contrary to those of Hindu orthodoxy. Leaders of the latter group and more frequently now, the media, often voice sharp criticism of the new preachers, calling them *jet gurus*, *false gurus*, and even “tricksters who undermine the foundation of the true faith.” Whether one calls them charlatans or wise men, they have millions of followers world wide. This new-age religion and “spirituality” has been one of India’s biggest exports since the 60s.

A recent film, *Kumare*, has brilliantly attempted to bring out the frailties of the follower and the making of a guru who really isn’t one. He is in fact the award-winning film and documentary maker Vikram Gandhi, who creates an ecosystem for youth. *Kumare* is one of his creations, created to explore the power of religion on those who choose to believe in it.

Through this film, the paper will try to explore the question of what is the social space these gurus and babas and sadhus inhabit, who affords them this space and what is the place of the follower in this phenomenon. What is the special relationship between the guru and

Prof. Dr. Chandrabhanu Pattanayak is the Director for India Programs at the University of Hawai’i, Manoa and Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean of Himgiri Zee University Haryana, India.

the devotee and how society itself is being reframed as a result of this complex relationship.

A characteristic trait of the social and, to a certain extent, political life of India over the last ten to twenty-five years has been the appearance and rapid growth of the influence of various types of new forms of religious worship, as well as of individual saints, incarnate gods, gurus and swamis (religious teachers), yogis and tantrics, astrologers and soothsayers who have a vast and growing number of followers. “These cults are called neo-religious because, although their leaders usually use some of the postulates, symbols, and practices of traditional Hinduism, they develop their own rituals, system of views, and cult practices that differ widely and are often contrary to those of Hindu orthodoxy. Leaders of the latter group and more frequently now, the media, often voice sharp criticism of the new preachers, calling them *jet gurus*, *false gurus*, and even tricksters who undermine the foundation of the true faith.” Whether one calls them charlatans or wise men, they have millions of followers worldwide. This new-age religion and “spirituality” has been one of India’s biggest exports since the 60s.

What I propose to do here is to try and locate the social space that is afforded to this new age Guru within which he/she survives, and operates. What I also am trying to see is whether these Gurus are operating essentially within a religious frame or that of a ritualistic one. I shall venture to go a step further and try to explore whether in fact, if ritual is what they are engaged in, then it is extended to “play” rather than religious ritual.

In order to take this discussion forward, I would like to play a short video of a TED talk of an American Film maker of Indian origin who engaged in a social experiment and filmed himself. Here he is talking about this experiment. I would have ideally liked all of you to have seen the film before this, but, the trailer is included here. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3BJ23H5yBQ><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3BJ23H5yBQ>

Kumaré: The Time I Became A Guru*Posted: 07/06/2012 12:04 pm*

Six years ago, I filmed a gang of sadhus (spiritual ascetics) smoking weed on the banks of the Holy Ganga in Northern India. Their guru stepped away from a young European woman meditating under a banyan tree, and approached me, machete in hand. "You want to know about gurus?" He popped a squat, and lit up a bidi. "All those big gurus you see, they are not spiritual people. All they want is money. It's not that easy man... Living a spiritual life is very difficult." That night, they swapped the pot for heroin.

Back home in New York City, I filmed the world around me embracing the "spiritual life," or at least one packaged into a healthful 90-minute alternative to aerobics class. The modern definition of yoga is convoluted as the postures yogis aspire to. Symbols, smells, words, icons, and religions of the East became an easy aesthetic for branding and marketing. Was the culture I grew up in becoming just a marketing scheme for a flourishing industry? In yoga class, was I the only one who wasn't feeling the vibe of getting enlightened? And why were people all of a sudden bowing down to people in robes with expensive philosophies and the promises of happiness? I became skeptical of anyone who sold a spiritual product, anyone who claimed to be holier than anyone else, anyone who said they had the answer.

Since those days as one-man crew, my answers and strong opinions have turned more into questions. As a documentarian on the edge of a subculture for years, the lives of the characters I met have come full circle -- almost repeating the same plot lines as the teachers that fell decades before them. I've tried Iyengar, Ashtanga, Jivamukti, Kundalini, Anusara, and met the founders, inventors, entrepreneurs, and gurus in many traditions. I've also chanted (reluctantly and enthusiastically), set intentions, retained breath, hugged a saint -- or rather got hugged by one, received blessings, blessed, fasted, veg'd out, finished a first series, kriya-ed, flossed my nose, taken pilgrimages, avoided dysentery, bathed in the

royal baths, found moments of deep tranquility, gave in to temptation, restrained it, fluctuated mentally, and even saw a most surreal event called an International Yoga Competition. I've said 'No, it's Vikram with a V' more than any other phrase these past few years. I learned from this, that practice never makes anyone perfect. We are all the same -- flawed, yet capable of greatness.

Trailer:

I'd always wanted to make a movie about 'us' -- about our inner, "spiritual" lives. I've watched so many movies about 'them' -- the backwards people of the others and even, the fundamentalist right-wingers. What about us? Why don't we turn our gaze back on ourselves? I figured: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So, I impersonated a wise guru from the East named Kumaré and started a following of real people in the West.

The character Kumaré was the center of a social experiment testing what we coined "The Spiritual Placebo Effect." Can a fake religion and religious leader have the same effect as a real one? If the facts are not real, does it make the experience any less real? Some people were appalled, offended at the idea. It's easy not to question what feels right -- people think you're being a downer, a bummer, or a cynic. But to me, asking questions, breaking down icons and idols, and destroying the illusions our society is built on are highly 'spiritual' acts. And aren't the saviors of history the ones that decided to speak up and say something?

This film was my humble attempt to bring the spiritual heroes I learned about as a child to the real world. I studied Buddha, Shiva, Krishna, Jesus -- all the big ones but it took the form a bearded barefoot man who carried a trident and spoke like my grandmother.

It was not a matter of fooling people -- everyone from the footsteps of the Himalayas to the Mexican Border believed in Kumaré. I suspect this is not because I am a great actor, but because Kumaré is a

dream worth believing in. Being a fictional spiritual leader has a lot more rules than being a real a guru. No money can be earned. No temptation can be acted upon. My character only saw the highest in people, his 'motivation' was to make them happy -- to trick people to be happy.

At Q&A's, people ask me if I'm still as critical of spiritual leaders as I was when I started. I can say now that I understand why we have spiritual leaders, and how slippery the slope is from hero to villain, when one takes on that role. I may be more sympathetic now, but I still always think back to something Kumaré once said: "It is you real gurus that make us fake gurus so necessary."

So there are several questions that are raised here: Are people free to choose? Are the devotees being duped by the clever ad-guru (literally)? Is this Guru, in creating these rituals, creating some process of healing for devotees who are hurting in some inner psycho-spiritual realm? Is religion itself something we need to question? Starting with the background of the recent media focus on several gurus engaged in rape, murder, financial embezzlement, cheating political impropriety and various other abominations in India, it would be interesting to look at how, building on the legacy of the mystical and spiritual authority of the East, and having had the way paved by Vivekananda, today's New Age Indian gurus, even those who rarely leave India, negotiate their charismatic spiritual authority through global networks. Scholarly literature on Indian gurus has engaged discourses across the academic disciplines to address theoretical topics such as cosmopolitanism, diaspora, globalization, religious pluralism, and gender, and this literature has contributed to our understandings of social realities of Hindu Nationalism and the Indian middle class. As Angela Rudert points out, "These scholarly conversations are by no means complete, and more attention to Indian gurus, especially multi-sited studies of guru-led movements at various stages of development, will benefit its continuation. However, new conversations need to begin as well, and this essay suggests that new enquiries on contemporary Indian gurus

should begin to address the term 'New Age' and what this means in various contexts as it applies to guru-led movements. Particularly, we should be asking what 'New Age' means for Indian gurus themselves and for their constituencies in India and around the globe. The already messy modifier, 'New Age' undergoes its own transformations as it traverses transnational terrain, religious sensibilities, histories and worldviews around the figure of the New Age guru"².

Asaram Bapu, the latest in a list of miscreant Gurus, when he was arrested for allegedly raping a sixteen year-old girl, saw in the Indian media an O. J. Simpson kind chase drama being played out. For days on end people watched transfixed, as this "drama" unfolded through myriad of intrigues of now seen and now gone. Perhaps George Orwell was on to something when he said that "saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent", for no all-too-human godman can ever live up to the qualities of godliness. Perhaps the wise course to take is to reflect upon the tragedy of overweening human ambition of these fallen gurus and move on.

Yet, if one pauses to think about it, Asaram's arrest is not just a matter of one more godman's personal failings. Rather, this episode dramatises the thin line between faith and blind faith, and the near complete merger of faith, politics and money in contemporary Indian society. Hundreds of thousands of his followers still stand by him steadfastly for he has touched them in some way in the past.

A few months ago another Baba, who calls himself "Nirmal Baba" (untainted, virtuous, pure) was arrested and put into prison for having cheated his flock. Sai Baba, one of the most popular of the Gurus in the last 3 decades left behind a messy inheritance, when it was found, on his death that his personal wealth amounted to 16 billion dollars. Ramdev Baba one of the most popular of them all in the recent past has been the target of several inquiries for misappropriation of finances and several other charges. Whether any of these charges are true or

false is not my concern here. What intrigues me is that in spite of such public outrage, charges, counter-charges and humiliation, millions of people still steadfastly follow them. After all they are their Gurus. What is the social space that they inhabit? Who gives them this space and why is this kind of supposed blind faith allowed in a modern 21st. century nation/world? In fact, a large number of their followers are from different parts of the world and not Indians.

So then what or who is a Guru? According to the *Hindu Primer* written by *Shukavaka N. Dasa*, “The word *guru* means “heavy” or “deep,” thus a guru is a person “heavy” or “deep” in knowledge. In this sense a school-teacher is a guru, a coach or athletic instructor is a guru, a fine-arts or even a dance teacher is a guru. One’s parents are also gurus.”³ According to the *Brahmanda Puran a guru is*

“Guru is Shiva sans his three eyes,
Vishnu sans his four arms
Brahma sans his four heads.
He is *parama* Shiva himself in human form”

Guru is the God, says the scriptures. Indeed, the ‘guru’ in Vedic tradition is looked upon as one no less than a God. ‘Guru’ is a honorific designation of a preceptor as defined and explained variously in the scriptures and ancient literary works including epics. The English word ‘guru’ has its etymological origin in the Sanskrit term. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines it as “Hindu spiritual teacher or head of religious sect; influential teacher; revered mentor”.

In this sense, the guru is more real than the gods. Basically the guru is a spiritual teacher leading the disciple on the path of “god-realization”. In essence, the guru is considered a respected person with saintly qualities who enlightens the mind of his disciple, an educator from whom one receives the initiatory mantra, and one who instructs in rituals and religious ceremonies. The *Vishnu Smriti* and *Manu Smriti* regards the *Acharya* (teacher), along with the mother and the father as

the most venerable gurus of an individual. According to *Deval Smriti* there can be eleven kinds of gurus and according to *Nama Chintamani* ten. According to his functions he is categorized as *rishi*, *acharyam*, *upadhya*, *kulapati* or *mantravetta*.

Thus to have a guru who acts as the master is an essential part of spiritual growth and so to feel respect for and to want to honor one’s guru is natural and healthy. However, there is a tendency now days “for the development of guru “cults” where the worship of guru supersedes the worship of God. This generally takes place when the original idea of guru as teacher becomes diminished and is replaced by the idea of guru as “blesser.” To be blessed by a guru is considered the greatest thing, but people forget that the real blessing of a guru comes in the form of study, discipline, and hard work that leads to knowledge and wisdom and not just with the touch of a hand. The idea of guru as blesser is a debasement of the true role of a guru”.⁴ So if the role of the Guru has been somehow debased, then what really is going on? Why are there so many gurus today and why are there so many people following these numerous gurus?

Sudhir Kakar in his excellent study, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors – A Psychological Enquiry into India and its Healing Traditions*⁵, seems to suggest that apart from the various practitioners of different healing traditions such as *hakims*, *vaidis*, there are also palmists, horoscope specialists, herbalists, diviners, sorcerers and a variety of shamans whose therapeutic efforts combine classical Indian astrology, medicine, alchemy and magic with beliefs and practices from folk and popular traditions. Apart from these, “we have the ubiquitous *sadhus*, *swamis*, *maharajas*, *babas*, *matas* and *bhagwans* who trace their lineage in some fashion to the mystical spiritual traditions of Indian antiquity and claim to specialize in ‘soul health’, the restoration of moral and spiritual well being”⁶.

Unlike Western psychotherapy, where introspection has significant bearing on the concept of “true self”, the meditative procedures of Indian psycho-philosophical schools of ‘self-realization’ are of a

different nature and follow radically different goals. The Indian injunction, 'know thy-self', is related to a self other than the one referred to by Socrates. "It is a self uncontaminated by time and space and thus without the life-historical dimension which is the focus of psychoanalysis and Western romantic literature. This inherent belief in the supra-historical self is shared by almost all traditional as well as modern religious cults in India"⁷

Professor Kakar also draws interesting contrasts between the Indian and the Western views of the 'person' with regard to the problem of human freedom. This difference in the interpretation of the meaning of human freedom in Western and Indian religio-mystic traditions as well as conceptualization of this term in post-independence cults of modern godmen in India is also of vital importance in understanding the divergent approach of these traditions in tackling the various ailments and the problem of human happiness. This would mean that one is able to, through some ritual practices or exercises, experience various inner states of consciousness by associating with different gods and goddesses at the same time having the external constant or unchanging.

This method of inducing a dissociated state – rhythmic music, dance, over-breathing and stimulation of the semi-circular canals by rotation of the head may vary. How dissociation actually works in healing, as Professor Kakar points out is still a mystery though there are a few speculations. As suggested these dissociation techniques are not solely the prerogative of shamans and other healers. They have in fact, been very effectively used by modern Gurus. Almost all Gurus today use some form of the dissociation techniques in the ritual initiation into the cult, where dance, rhythmic music and variation in lighting is masterfully combined to create the desired effect.

Thus human freedom in the traditional Indian context seems to imply an increase in the potential to experience different inner states while limiting action in the outer world to stereotypes and unquestioned adaptation. The Indian emphasis has been on the pursuit of an inner differentiation while keeping the outer world constant. In contrast the

notion of freedom in the West is related to an increase in the potential for acting in the outer world and enlarging the sphere of choices, while keeping the inner state constant to that of a rational, waking consciousness from which other modes of inner experience have been excluded as deviations.

In the Indian culture, where the fear of separation and loss is considered as the most legitimate of human anxieties, and where the ideal model of learning and personal transformation stressed identification – the student being proud to be even a poor copy of the preceptor – it is precisely these aspects that are seen as limitations of the *guru-shishya parampara* or model that are seen as its virtues. It is therefore not surprising that some Indian psychiatrists consider the *guru-shishya parampara* as the most acceptable model of psychotherapy in the Indian setting.

The prolific growth of the religio-mystical cults like ISKCON, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh, Sai Baba, Asharam Bapu, Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravishankar and many more should be viewed in the context of a the emergence of a homogenized world and the middle and upper classes; a homogenized set of aspirations that are being created and sold to all across boundaries. As Bertram Gross put it, "In today's first world, oppression takes many different forms. It is rooted in the frustration of rising aspirations, in the anguish of old crises in new forms, in the new environmental crisis and in the erosion of authority. Above all the impact of tendencies towards extended professionalism accentuates fragmentation, anxiety and alienation. The bi-products of accelerated consumption are boredom apathy and tension. The slow growth of concentrated elite power builds up repressed aggressiveness and despair at all levels"⁸ (*A Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America*, M. Evans, New York, 1980). This situation according to Gross, generates a huge and desperate demand for something to belong to and believe in.

Now to take a different track altogether, that of ritual. To both ethnologists and neurologists, ritual is central to both behavior and brain structure/function. While Kakar locates the ritual form in the dislocation of the external and the internal, Victor Turner locates ritual

“betwixt-and-between,” in cultural creases and margins, making it more like “play” than anything else. The ritual process is liminal-liminoid, unauthorized, anti-structural subjective (“if”), and subversive. The contradiction also expresses the difference between Turner’s social perspective and the ethnologist’s-neurologist’s biological one. The difference is a version of an old, insoluble argument between determinists and those who assert that humans are free to make their own destinies.

Turner saw the ritual process as analogous to the training-workshop-rehearsal process where accepted or readymade texts and accepted ways of using the body and feelings are deconstructed or broken down into small usable bits of behavior, feeling, thought and text and then reconstructed in new ways, sometimes to be offered as public performances. In traditional genres such as Kathakali, Kallaripattu, ballet or Noh theatre, people start their training early in life. This training involves new ways of speaking, gesturing, moving maybe even new ways of thinking and feeling. New for the trainee but well known in the tradition of the respective forms of performance. Just as in initiation rights, the mind and body of each performer are returned towards a state of *tabula rasa*, ready to be written on in the language of the form being learned. When finished with training, the performer can speak ‘kathakali’, ‘kalaripattu’, ‘noh’, ‘kumara’ or ‘Baba Ramdev’: he/she is truly “incorporated” into the tradition. The violence of scarring or circumcision is absent – but deep permanent psychological changes are wrought.

It is precisely when the creative and/or subversive function of ritual dominates, spills over its usually well defined boundaries that art separates from – and sometimes opposes – religion. The makers of carnival, Hopi mudhead clowns, are also anti structural, but always in the service of ultimately of reinforcing traditional ways of doing and thinking. A period of licence is permitted, even required. Things are done “backwards,” excesses are celebrated, promiscuous sexuality and drunkenness flourish. But then Ash Wednesday terminates carnival and the subversive shenanigans of Mardi Gras are put away for another year.⁹

This is exactly what happens in the Ramlila and the Dushehra/ Durga puja, Holi and Diwali in India. The demon is destroyed and all is brought back to peace. People know exactly what to expect and what the actions represent. However in art, things are different. The subversion is continuous. As Schechner so eloquently put it, “The avante garde is art’s permanent revolution”.

The violence acted out in performance is no longer “symbol”, sapped of its ability to wound, frighten or astonish. Even if there is no apparent violence, there is a real danger and risk involved in it. This danger is a “mortgaged actuality indefinitely postponing catastrophe”¹⁰. Ritual violence is not a remembrance of things past. The present moment is always a negotiation between a wished-for future and rehearsable, and therefore, changeable past. History is always in flux; that is what makes it so like a performance. The mortgaged future is always death; the past is always life as-remembered or restaged. Individuals, all of who will die are assimilated into families, groups, religions and ideologies which are putatively immortal. The stories these groups tell, their ritual enactments concern temporary and uneasy triumphs over death.

Thus all devotees of all babas/gurus are in a perpetual play where their lives are mortgaged to a restaged past. And this is why in some sense, the devotees are not able to see the disjuncture in the reality when their babas or gurus are arrested or go to jail or commit larceny or rape or fraud. This is also why, Political parties with extreme ideologies are able to use these babas and their congregations for their own benefit. This is theatre. We are evolved into a complex network of games, contingencies and scenarios played out in various “theatres”.

At a certain deep level of dreaming – a level that is as much cultural as it is individual – strong links connect tragedy, violence sexuality and farce. Milan Kundera nicely invokes this progression from laughter to arousal to violence:

There she stood in front of the mirror (they always stood in front of the mirror while she undressed), watching

*themselves. She stripped to her underwear but still had the (bowler) hat on her head. And all at once she realized they were both excited by what they saw in the mirror. What could have excited them so? A moment before, the hat on her head had seemed nothing but a joke. Was excitement really a mere step away from laughter? Yes, when they looked at each other in the mirror that time, all she saw for the first few seconds was a comic situation. But suddenly the comic became veiled by excitement, the bowler hat no longer signified a joke, it signified violence.*¹¹ (Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Harper, New York, 1985, pp. 86)

After all what is a human being if not a dreaming organism? When dreams were first performed – not only dreamed and remembered, but spoken danced sung and acted out – a definite threshold was crossed . Performing a dream actualizes what can never be shown. A dream is experienced first hand only by the dreamer; like the violence of Greek tragedy, it is forever offstage, shared only in so far as it can be represented. Babas or Gurus of the new age are “dream-trained”. They can focus their dreams, retain and retell them. This retelling can be in any medium, words, actions, pictures, sounds. These dream-trained people can also freely combine their dreams with what they get from the outside world, from ordinary life, from tradition or any other source. Is this what Prof Kakar talked about when he talked about dissociation of the external and the internal? Is this what Kumare has ultimately achieved—the most effective play most exhaustively rehearsed?

Appendix 1

Kumare Review

Vikram Gandhi was a disillusioned religion student who went seeking spiritual leaders and discovered that most of them are unnecessary con men bilking needy people out of a need to assuage their own egos or to

score desperate tail. He wanted to prove to people that they did not need some guru to open up their better selves — that religion and sensibility are within everyone. So he got together a yoga instructor and a publicist and transformed himself into the spiritual guru Kumare, a faux yogi who was there to take in people easily lured by the billion dollar spiritual guidance industry and show them that they didn’t need anyone else to be amazing. The social experiment seems cruel, and as he lures in followers and finds people with genuine problems opening up to him in the process, Gandhi himself changes as a person. What starts as a *Borat*-style parody that demonstrates the foolishness and gullibility of the devotees of various self-help and spiritualist movements, like Law of Attraction and yoga enthusiasts, quickly develops into a fascinating study on what it means to have faith. Belief is an incredibly strong emotion, something that will drive people to lengths and breadths that they never thought themselves capable. *Kumare* could easily have been a cruel movie, making fun of these clingy suckers who’ll absorb any sap you splash on them, but instead takes the difficult high road and becomes incredibly poignant. Even as you wince and chuckle at the characters, you find yourself caring about them as much as Gandhi eventually does. And that’s what elevates the documentary beyond mere mockery.

Vikram Gandhi, a native of New Jersey who narrates the documentary in a clear as a bell voiceover, grows out his hair and beard and adopts the more traditional mutter of his grandmother to become Kumare. Kumare is a likable fellow, a continuously happy guru, clutching what’s essentially a trident with a testicle shaped character at the top, and with a silent open-mouthed laugh. Gandhi dons the orange robes and loincloths that we expect from a Central Casting swami. He learns yoga, and then develops a routine of various yoga-like moves that are meant to be ridiculous to see what he could get people to fall for. Because he looks and sounds the part, he’s able to convince a yoga class to do a motion that resembles people doing power strums on air guitar or to grunt and strain like panting dogs. He gets them to chant nonsensical sounds or to say “Be All That You Can Be” in Hindi. With

the help of two willing assistants, a publicist and a yoga instructor, he's able to quickly permeate the yoga community of Arizona.

While hilariously exposing how people will pretty much buy anything if they think it comes from an authentic source, the film begins to take a turn as we dip into the lives of the core group of Kumare devotees. These are people with genuine problems and concerns who are clinging to Kumare to save them. It would have been a very different and less effective film if Gandhi were playing everything for laughs. It would be *Borat*, which was just as instrumental at exposing the hypocrisy of the average citizen. Gandhi's thesis from the very start was to start a religious movement that helped people to learn that they didn't need religious movements. He's constantly telling people that he's fake, that he's not what they think he is, and they so want to believe him that it becomes painful. You can see throughout the film how uncomfortable and pained Gandhi is beneath his playful Kumare exterior. He realizes that he might completely destroy these people who only wanted help and that he is genuinely trying to help. The film actually opens with scenes just before he's about to initiate the "Great Unveiling." Gandhi stares at himself in a mirror, with a mortified look on his face, shaking and about to dry heave. He never intends to hurt anyone, and that's kind of what permits us to laugh along and prevents the film from dipping into cruelty and callousness, which elevates it to such a moving experience.

Of course, this all might be bullshit. The very film *Kumare* is about a con man, and Gandhi might just be manufacturing his own sentimentality. POSSIBLE SPOILER ALERT: When he does reveal himself to be a regular person, there are plenty of folks who simply walk away or are grievously pained by his deception. Those that forgive him end up bettering themselves. We don't hear from those who were disillusioned. So by nature of the documentarian, he's probably spinning everything to look less the dickhole. But I'm fine with that. ENDETH SPOILERS.

Kumare is a daring social experiment in what it means to have faith. Gandhi is not preaching the gospel of the fallacy of organized religion.

He's merely stating that most people are capable of achieving that without paying money to some evangelist, whether he sports a fake tan and a shiny diamond crucifix tie tack or a scraggly beard and bare feet. I found the film to be incredibly moving — I got a little teary-eyed towards the end — because I wanted these people to find what they were looking for. And that's the heart of *Kumare*, there seems to be a genuine and heartwarming effort to help people find the help they need and to turn their faith in on themselves.

Kumare is screening in the documentary competition at the SXSW 2011 Film Festival.

Appendix 2 The Holy Men of India



ENDNOTES

- ¹ B. I. Kliuev, Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia, Vol.25. Number 1, 1986, 79-98.
- ² Angela Rudert, Research on Contemporary Indian Gurus: What's New about New Age Gurus?, Religion Compass Volume 4, Issue 10, October 2010, pages 629–642
- ³ Shukavaka N. Dasa, A Hindu Primer, Sanskrit Religions Institute, 2007, quoted from <http://www.sanskrit.org/www/Hindu%20Primer/HinduPrimer.htm>.
- ⁴ Shukavaka N. Dasa, A Hindu Primer, Sanskrit Religions Institute, 2007, quoted from <http://www.sanskrit.org/www/Hindu%20Primer/HinduPrimer.htm>.
- ⁵ Sudhir Kakar, Shamans, Mystics and Doctors – A Psychological Enquiry into India and its Healing Traditions, University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- ⁶ Uday Mehta, A.R Desai, Modern Godmen in India: A Sociological Appraisal, Vol 1, Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., pp155-158
- ⁷ Uday Mehta, A.R Desai, Modern Godmen in India: A Sociological Appraisal, Vol 1, Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., pp155-158
- ⁸ Evans, M. (1980) A Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America, New York.
- ⁹ Richard Schechner, The Future of Ritual, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp.258.
- ¹⁰ Richard Schechner, The Future of Ritual, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp.258.
- ¹¹ Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Harper, New York, 1985, pp. 86.

The Methods of Dhamma Preaching in Lanna

Ven. P.B. Saneh Ñānamedhī

The paper aims to examine the development of traditional Lanna preaching styles and to investigate the factors influencing their development. Qualitative research was conducted, content analysis, the transcript from Dhamma preaching tape records as well as in-depth interviews were used as data collection methods.

The findings revealed that Dhamma preaching in Traditional Lanna style has a specific form. The preaching monk has to sit on a high throne, reading scriptures recorded on the palm leaf with a local rhythm. While the audience sit calmly and properly with two hands put together in a lotus shape. The audience behavior shows high respect towards the Dhamma which represents the Buddha verse. It is believed that listening to Dhamma not only brings great wisdom, increases faith to the Triple Gem among audience, but also brings significant merit and allows the audience to greatly spread this merit to their ancestors.

After the Lanna Kingdom was dissolved and became part of the northern region of Thailand in 1899, rules, regulations, as well as the education system in Lanna were reformed by the Central Thai. This resulted in the Lanna people becoming fluent in speaking, reading, writing and listening in Thai language. While Lanna language became less important and was never promoted since then. Hence the new generation of Lanna people especially monks were unable to read and write in the Lanna language. This is why today's scriptures are mostly adapted and recorded in Thai language and printed on the folded hard paper replicating the palm leaf style for more convenience. Furthermore, the impromptu rhetoric preaching style from a preaching monk from Central Thai also spread to Lanna.

Ven. Dr. P.B. Saneh Ñānamedhī is a professor at the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai, Thailand